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## The Righteousness which is of Faith.<sup>1</sup>

*Romans x. 4-11.*

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THE confessed difficulty of this passage is not grammatical nor lexical ; nor does it lie in the use that St. Paul here makes of the words of Moses. So far as regards its external features the passage is simple enough. As little is the difficulty due to the mere intricacy of the thought. Let once the clue be secured and faithfully held, and the thought is not lacking in clearness. But it is a thought at once high and deep, and wellnigh immeasurable both ways. Besides, — and herein lies the real difficulty, — the passage is, perhaps preëminently in the whole New Testament, the meeting-ground of the great foundation-ideas of Christianity. As Richard Wagner in his musical dramas blends together widely varying *motives* — melodic, rhythmic, harmonic — to bring out by their union some master idea or situation ; so here are interwoven the great Christian and Jewish *motives*, — righteousness, faith, law, Christ, — each preserving its individuality, yet each contributing to the expression of the others, and all uniting to form a new concept, the righteousness which is of faith.

There is indeed a real problem here ; one which no doubt occurs to every Christian thinker, and which, so far as I am aware, is not distinctly answered elsewhere in the New Testament. Faith in Christ is counted to the believer for righteousness ; this, however, not because it is in any sense a substitute for righteousness. There can be no such substitute ; righteousness is an eternal demand, to Christian as to Jew ; and such righteousness is fundamentally conformity to a law. Faith then is counted for righteousness because it is a power to produce righteousness. But when now we are bidden to have faith in Christ and leave the old dead law, and when we are assured that all this provision is made “that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us,” it is not at once obvious how committal to a personal Lord, and that too with apparent slighting of the law, is nevertheless to work conformity to the law. There is a letting go of the old, but there is not apparent such a grasp of the new as to work

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<sup>1</sup> Read in June, 1884.

the assured result. This then is the problem : how does faith produce righteousness?

To solve this problem these four ideas, righteousness, faith, law, Christ, two Jewish and two Christian, are here interwoven. But while all the ideas retain their distinctive individuality, each takes a coloring from the others, is expressed, as far as may be, in terms of the others. Christ is the end of the law for righteousness. Righteousness is described in terms of faith. Faith is represented as laying plans for work, for the achievement which is righteousness ; and yet faith's achievement is expressed not in terms of law, but of Christ. All this produces the remarkable mingling of dialects which chiefly makes the passage difficult. In the interpretation, therefore, we need first, to consider each constituent idea, in the particular aspect which its present relation gives it ; and then we shall be prepared to trace the greater concept as a whole.

## I.

In the first place, then, what office does each of these ideas fulfil in the whole definition, and how is its aspect modified by the influence of the others?

1. Righteousness. What we need to bear in mind regarding this word is, that it is a constant term. It does not mean one thing in the Old Testament and another in the New. Righteousness — rightness — is nothing less than conformity to the law of holiest manhood, which is the law of God ; and hence, whenever and wherever achieved, it is one righteousness, just as God is one and manhood one. Its requirements are as great for Christian as for Jew, nay, greater, because its standard is more completely and searchingly defined. Among the earliest declarations of Christ's ministry was the solemn word, "Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled." Then He took up the old legislation point by point, and showed how much more inward and genuine obedience must thenceforth be than ever before.

If then righteousness is eternally one, Moses' definition of it remains as true as it ever was. "The man that *doeth* the righteousness which is of the law shall live thereby." Though produced by faith, it remains essentially a doing, a work, an achievement ; and though the law is not of faith (Gal. iii. 12), yet the provision of faith in Christ and of walking in the Spirit is made "that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us" (Rom. viii. 4).

The two contrasts used in our passage and its context in the definition of righteousness need a word of discrimination.

a. The two terms here contrasted, the righteousness which is of the law, and the righteousness which is of faith, designate not two different righteousnesses, but two different means of attaining the same righteousness. The contrast, indicated by the preposition of origin ἐκ, is simply between the ἐκ νόμου and the ἐκ πίστεως; and the whole passage is Paul's masterly way of showing how faith accomplishes "what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh."

b. The other contrast, drawn in the 3d verse of this chapter, illustrates the mingling of dialects of which I have spoken. "For [the Jews], being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own, did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God." So far as it is the result of a man's personal effort, righteousness must be counted his own; it is something worked for and achieved. But if it appears in a divine Standard, to be attained by divine help, it is the righteousness of God; and then it may be described in terms of faith, as something to be "submitted to." It is the same righteousness from different points of view.

2. Faith. To make clear its harmony with the other *motives* in the great symphony, this element must be viewed as an active, energizing principle, not as mere passive receptiveness. Faith is to achieve what work has always tried to achieve; and therefore, while it remains just as truly trust in a transcendent source of help, it must yet have an initiative in itself, plan for attaining and against recreancy. This active nature of faith is very suggestively recognized here in the form of the expression. While the ἐκ νόμου righteousness is treated as a dead concept, to be discussed and defined, the ἐκ πίστεως righteousness is represented as speaking, warning, instinct with life. "The righteousness which is of faith *speaketh* on this wise." This fact indeed is no mere figure of speech or alternative expression, but contains the root of the whole contrast. Under the law, "the man which doeth . . . shall live." Life is here the goal, not the starting-point: it is set before the doer as something to be worked *toward*, but not yet achieved. Under faith we may reverse the proposition, and say, The man which liveth shall do, or rather *will* do, for the doing is chosen and loved. Faith, which in its deepest is communion of divine life, has first of all imparted life to the believer: this life therefore is the starting-point, to be worked *from*, and its goal is Christ's risen glory. This new righteousness then has a voice, a character, for itself; it is just the result that comes when a divinely given life works out spontaneously the law of its being. It is faith in action.

3. Christ and the Law. Concerning these two elements we need

here to recognize the fact that they are absolutely identified with each other. "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth." What therefore was once expressed as conformity to law becomes in the new dialect conformity to Christ, because in His life

"the law appears  
Drawn out in living characters."

For the believer Christ and law are convertible terms ; and to achieve righteousness is simply to achieve the life of Christ.

With this identification of terms in view, we need now to return a moment and make a closer discrimination in our definition of faith. Inasmuch as Christ is our Redeemer, offering us salvation, our faith is a trust in His promise and acceptance of His terms. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." This aspect of faith, however, is not the one to be emphasized here. Here faith is turned toward achieving ; it must be expressed, as far as may be, in terms of action, because out of it comes righteousness. It views Christ therefore as personal Lord and Pattern, to whom allegiance and conformity are due ; and thus its attitude may perhaps best be expressed by the word loyalty. It is the active principle of trust, centered in a person, and looking toward achievement.

## II.

Having thus sought, as the foundation of our treatment, a careful discrimination of terms, let us now trace step by step the apostle's solution of the problem how faith produces righteousness.

1. Faith in its present attitude, as we have noticed, takes the form of loyalty. In curious accordance with this idea, the righteousness which is of faith is represented at the outset as uttering a monition against disloyalty, or recreancy. "The righteousness which is of faith speaketh thus, 'Say not in thy heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down;) or, who shall descend into the abyss?' (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what saith it? 'The word is nigh thee, in thy mouth and in thy heart': that is, the word of faith, which we preach." This last sentence makes it evident what is the temper of mind here contemplated and warned against. Tholuck, and after him Alford, have raised the inquiry whether these questions, Who shall ascend? who shall descend? betoken unbelief, or embarrassment, or anxiety. They betoken none of the three. They are simply the questionings of a disloyal heart,

seeking in some way to evade its ideal. Such questionings, such disloyalty, the righteousness which is of faith forestalls and checks. It says in effect : " Cherish no querulous evasions. Seek not to cheapen the terms of your righteousness. The way is plain and straight before you. Christ is your ideal, just as He is preached ; Christ the glorified, Christ the crucified and risen. Take Him as He is, the embodiment of your righteousness ; be loyal to Him, whatever the heights or depths to which He leads you ; and seek not to make Him other."

2. Let us consider a moment what loyalty would require, and what disloyalty would seek to evade, in the double light of the terms law and Christ.

The law holds before men an ideal to be attained, and perfect righteousness is the complete attainment of the ideal. Now in the endeavor to achieve what the law demands, two conceivable temptations may arise : the temptation to lower the ideal, or the temptation in seeking it to choose a less strenuous way than the law dictates. That is, the unfaithful worker may desire, in order to make his work easier, to debase either the end to be reached or the means of reaching it.

Transfer now this fundamental idea to the new standard of righteousness. Christ, as the end, the complete embodiment of the law, is the loyal soul's ideal ; and the righteousness which is of faith is the achievement of Christ-likeness. Now the law embodied in a person, as in a statute, has, if we may so say, its heights and its depths ; there is a supreme goal of attainment, and a strenuous road thereto, neither of which the truly loyal soul will think of evading. The supreme height of Christ is measured by the glory on which He entered when His course was done, " the name which is above every name " given to Him as the reward of His faithfulness (Phil. ii. 9). Nothing short of this can measure the requirements of ideal righteousness, in terms of Christ. The lowliest depth of Christ, the most searching and strenuous humiliation, is measured by His obedience to the death of the cross (Phil. ii. 7, 8). That this freely chosen death was in the way of righteousness is evinced by the fact that it issued in resurrection. Christ's glory was the sequence not of a mere ascension, through various grades of dignity, but of resurrection, which was preceded by death and humiliation. If then the believer's righteousness takes its ideal from Christ, it seeks its glory through resurrection ; that is, it submits to the same obedience unto death, in the faith that there will surely be a rising again. Nothing less strenuous than this can measure, in terms of Christ, the involvements of ideal righteousness.

3. Now the righteousness which is of faith is here represented as warning the believer against questioning with regard to these very things, the height and the depth of Christ, who is his chosen ideal of life. Let us examine the monition it gives.

*a.* "Say not in thy heart, 'Who shall ascend into heaven?' (that is, to bring Christ down)." Here, and in the next three verses, Paul adopts a passage from Deut. xxx. 11-14, and uses it, much as we might run our thoughts into a line of Hamlet or Macbeth. He takes it as affording spontaneously a mould for his idea, yet makes it thoroughly his own by changing it freely to suit his purpose, and by adding running comments interpreting it for the case in hand. We are not to view this then as Paul's exegesis of an Old Testament passage; nor are we bound to suppose that his present application of it must necessarily be involved in the original. As a matter of fact he changes the application essentially; but this because he takes the thought as his own, no longer as the former writer's. The expression here, however, has to some degree the disadvantage of every quoted passage; we feel that it was not moulded originally for this present thought; and while we recognize its pertinence, yet we must rely more on the interpretation than on the quotation. There must be much weight therefore in the comment, "That is, to bring Christ down." And from our foregoing discussion we are prepared to see clearly what this whole passage means. It is the natural questioning of a soul tempted to disloyalty, as it stands half discouraged before its high and seemingly unattainable ideal. It is as if the believer should say: "Who shall bring Christ's glory (my ideal of righteousness) lower, ever so little lower, give me less to do, set my aspiration toward a height not so obviously unattainable, that I may have more reasonable hope of achieving." Against such a recreant spirit faith takes its stand, holds the heart true to its ideal, checks the doubt before it rises, and thus works to produce righteousness. Such a true spirit of allegiance cannot bear to make its standard lower, but will seek to rise where Christ has risen.

*b.* "Say not in thy heart, 'Who shall descend into the abyss?' (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead)." Here, in quoting from Deuteronomy, Paul substitutes for "beyond the sea," the words *εἰς τὴν ἄβυσσον*, "into the abyss," and with obvious reason: having thought of the heights of Christ and Christ-likeness, he now turns naturally to the corresponding depths. The intent of asking such a question, he says, is "to bring Christ up from the dead." With our foregoing discussion in mind, few if any words are now needed to

make this thought clear. We have here the natural questioning of a disloyal soul, seeking to make the means of attaining righteousness less strenuous. Christ's way to His glory was the way of death and resurrection. It involved a *κένωσις*, an utter self-abnegation and obedience, which to a soul not fully in earnest might well seem appalling. Now in our aspiration after Christ-likeness we may well be tempted to ask: "Is there no easier way to the goal? Must it lie through the grave, through death to self and sin, through uttermost submission, before it can issue in resurrection and glory? Who will descend into the abyss and bring Christ up, make His glory a glory without previous humiliation, restore Him from the grave and make His death as if it had never been?" Such questions as these are very near and very practical; because they have to do with the exactions of our own righteousness, which is measured by Christ. But the righteousness which is of faith checks and forestalls any such complaint; it will not consent to a way less genuine, less strenuous, less deeply involving, than that which its great Pattern has taken. Witness how heartily Paul himself chose this way, when in his letter to the Philippians he gave utterance to his supreme desire: "that I may win Christ and be found in Him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith; that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death; if by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead."

4. The remainder of our passage follows out with wonderful consistency the idea we have traced. "But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, in thy mouth and in thy heart." In the use of this quotation we need to eliminate any idea of place, as if righteousness were something to *go and get*: it is simply Paul's employment of Moses' words to express the idea that the way of righteousness is plain and obvious, not to be mistaken, not to be evaded. The word is just "the word of faith, which we preach"; it needs no further definition; it is simply that everywhere familiar apostolic teaching, setting forth Christ and the Christ-ideal. No curious search, no ingenious interpretation is needed, to determine our standard: "the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein."

The words "in thy mouth and in thy heart" furnish a suggestion which Paul turns with wonderful skill to his present thought. "The mouth" and "the heart" suggest the outside and the inside of Christian righteousness. The one is just as genuine, just as indispensable,



as the other. "With the mouth confession is made unto salvation." Confession is the believer's self-exaction of righteousness. If before the world he acknowledges Christ as Lord, he avowedly takes upon himself, for men to see and judge, the life of Christ, with its heights and depths, with its humiliation and glory, as a practical standard of conduct. "If thou wilt confess with thy mouth Jesus as Lord." After the foregoing definition, can we call this a light thing? Is it a mere formality?

"With the heart man believeth unto righteousness;" and the vital point, chosen of all others, wherein loyalty is tested is, the resurrection of Christ. "If thou wilt believe in thy heart that God raised Him from the dead." This is no arbitrary doctrine, chosen out of many as a test creed; it represents simply the fulness of practical trust in the Christ-life we have chosen. For when we accept as a standard of conduct the obedience unto death which our Lord exemplified, we cannot see the end; it must be done in faith that such death, though it seem to close every hope, will not fail to issue in resurrection. So this historic belief, that God raised Christ from the dead, is vitally connected with ourselves; it involves the belief that we, who are planted in the likeness of the same death, shall be raised together with Him. This central belief in the heart, therefore, is the most searching and yet the most natural test of the righteousness which is of faith, because it indicates how faith exerts its uttermost.

"For the Scripture saith, 'Whosoever believeth on Him shall not be ashamed.'" In the light of the foregoing this would seem to mean, not "shall not be put to shame," as by some supposable disaster, but, shall not cherish shame, or be confounded, because of what he has taken upon himself. Whosoever believeth on Christ shall take the plain word of faith, wonderful and deep-searching as it is, and without stumbling at it or seeking to evade, without being dismayed by end or means, or letting any spirit of disloyalty arise, go on buoyantly and confidently, until the same deep valley is passed and the same heights won, that are revealed in the life and death of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Perhaps now the best way to leave this subject will be to recapitulate the foregoing thought by reducing it to propositions.

1. Faith does not seek life through righteousness, but achieves righteousness through committal to Christ's perfect life.

2. Faith will not debase the Christlike ideal, however high its aim, but confesses it before the world as a practical standard of life.

3. Faith will not evade the Christlike way to the ideal, however deep its involvements, but cherishes the spirit of it as an inner trust.

And so, faith produces righteousness.